Aids Essay, Research Paper

AIDS is a life and death issue. To have the AIDS disease

is at present a sentence of slow but inevitable death. I’ve

already lost one friend to AIDS. I may soon lose others. My own

sexual behavior and that of many of my friends has been

profoundly altered by it. In my part of the country, one man in

10 may already be carrying the AIDS virus. While the figures may

currently be less in much of the rest of the country, this is

changing rapidly. There currently is neither a cure, nor even an

effective treatment, and no vaccine either. But there are things

that have been PROVEN immensely effective in slowing the spread

of this hideously lethal disease. In this essay I hope to

present this information. History and Overview:

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Defficiency Disease. It is

caused by a virus.

The disease originated somewhere in Africa about 20 years

ago. There it first appeared as a mysterious ailment afflicting

primarily heterosexuals of both sexes. It probably was spread

especially fast by primarily female prostitutes there. AIDS has

already become a crisis of STAGGERING proportions in parts of

Africa. In Zaire, it is estimated that over twenty percent of

the adults currently carry the virus. That figure is increasing.

And what occurred there will, if no cure is found, most likely

occur here among heterosexual folks.

AIDS was first seen as a disease of gay males in this

country. This was a result of the fact that gay males in this

culture in the days before AIDS had an average of 200 to 400 new

sexual contacts per year. This figure was much higher than

common practice among heterosexual (straight) men or women. In

addition, it turned out that rectal sex was a particularly

effective way to transmit the disease, and rectal sex is a

common practice among gay males. For these reasons, the disease

spread in the gay male population of this country immensely more

quickly than in other populations. It became to be thought of as

a “gay disease”. Because the disease is spread primarily by

exposure of ones blood to infected blood or semen, I.V. drug

addicts who shared needles also soon were identified as an

affected group. As the AIDS epidemic began to affect

increasingly large fractions of those two populations (gay males

and IV drug abusers), many of the rest of this society looked on

smugly, for both populations tended to be despised by the

“mainstream” of society here.

But AIDS is also spread by heterosexual sex. In addition,

it is spread by blood transfusions. New born babies can acquire

the disease from infected mothers during pregnancy. Gradually

more and more “mainstream” folks got the disease. Most recently,

a member of congress died of the disease. Finally, even the

national news media began to join in the task of educating the

public to the notion that AIDS can affect everyone.

Basic medical research began to provide a few bits of

information, and some help. The virus causing the disease was

isolated and identified. The AIDS virus turned out to be a very

unusual sort of virus. Its genetic material was not DNA, but

RNA. When it infected human cells, it had its RNA direct the

synthesis of viral DNA. While RNA viruses are not that uncommon,

very few RNA viruses reproduce by setting up the flow of

information from RNA to DNA. Such reverse or “retro” flow of

information does not occur at all in any DNA virus or any other

living things. Hence, the virus was said to belong to the rare

group of virues called “Retro Viruses”. Research provided the

means to test donated blood for the presence of the antibodies

to the virus, astronomically reducing the chance of ones getting

AIDS from a blood transfusion. This was one of the first real

breakthroughs. The same discoveries that allowed us to make our

blood bank blood supply far safer also allowed us to be able to

tell (in most cases) whether one has been exposed to the AIDS

virus using a simple blood test.

The Types of AIDS Infection:

When the AIDS virus gets into a person’s body, the results

can be broken down into three general types of situations: AIDS

disease, ARC, and asymptomatic seropositive condition.

The AIDS disease is characterized by having one’s immune

system devastated by the AIDS virus. One is said to have the

\*disease\* if one contracts particular varieties (Pneumocystis,

for example) of pneumonia, or one of several particular

varieties of otherwise rare cancers (Kaposi’s Sarcoma, for

example). This \*disease\* is inevitably fatal. Death occurs often

after many weeks or months of expensive and painful hospital

care. Most folks with the disease can transmit it to others by

sexual contact or other exposure of an uninfected person’s blood

to the blood or semen of the infected person.

There is also a condition referred to as ARC (”Aids

Related Complex”). In this situation, one is infected with the

AIDS virus and one’s immune system is compromised, but not so

much so that one gets the (ultimately lethal) cancers or

pneumonias of the AIDS disease. One tends to be plagued by

frequent colds, enlarged lymph nodes, and the like. This

condition can go on for years. One is likely to be able to

infect others if one has ARC. Unfortunately, all those with ARC

are currently felt to eventually progress to getting the full

blown AIDS disease.

There are, however, many folks who have NO obvious signs

of disease what so ever, but when their blood serum is tested

they show positive evidence of having been exposed to the virus.

This is on the basis of the fact that antibodies to the AIDS

virus are found in their blood. Such “asymptomatic but

seropositive” folks may or may not carry enough virus to be

infectious. Most sadly, though, current research and experience

with the disease would seem to indicate that EVENTUALLY nearly

all folks who are seropostive will develop the full blown AIDS

disease. There is one ray of hope here: It may in some cases

take up to 15 years or more between one’s becoming seropositive

for the AIDS virus and one’s developing the disease. Thus, all

those millions (soon to be tens and hundreds of millions) who

are now seropositive for AIDS are under a sentence of death, but

a sentence that may not be carried out for one or two decades in

a significan fraction of cases. Medical research holds the

possibility of commuting that sentence, or reversing it.

There is one other fact that needs to be mentioned here

because it is highly significant in determining recommendations

for safe sexual conduct which will be discussed below:

Currently, it is felt that after exposure to the virus, most

folks will turn seropositive for it (develop a positive blood

test for it) within four months. It is currently felt that if

you are sexually exposed to a person with AIDS and do not become

seropositive within six months after that exposure, you will

never become seropositive as a result of that exposure.

Just to confuse the issue a little, there are a few folks

whose blood shows NO antibodies to the virus, but from whom live

virus has been cultured. Thus, if one is seronegative, it is not

absolute proof one is not exposed to the virus. This category of

folks is very hard to test for, and currently felt to be quite

rare. Some even speculate that such folks may be rare examples

of those who are immune to the effects of the virus, but this

remains speculation. It is not known if such folks can also

transmit the virus.

Transmission of AIDS:

The AIDS virus is extremely fragile, and is killed by

exposure to mild detergents or to chlorox, among other things.

AIDS itself may be transmitted by actual virus particles, or by

the transmission of living human CELLS that contain AIDS viral

DNA already grafted onto the human DNA. Or both. Which of these

two mechanisms is the main one is not known as I write this

essay. But the fact remains that it is VERY hard to catch AIDS

unless one engages in certain specific activities.

What will NOT transmit AIDS?

Casual contact (shaking hands, hugging, sharing tools)

cannot transmit AIDS. Although live virus has been recovered

from saliva of AIDS patients, the techniques used to do this

involved concentrating the virus to extents many thousands of

times greater than occurs in normal human contact, such as

kissing (including “deep” or “French” kissing). Thus, there

remains no solid evidence that even “deep” kissing can transmit

AIDS. Similarly, there is no evidence that sharing food or

eating utensils with an AIDS patient can transmit the virus. The

same is true for transmission by sneezing or coughing. There just

is no current evidence that the disease can be transmitted that

way.The same may be true even for BITING,though here there may be

some increased (though still remote) chance of transmitting the

disease.

The above is very important. It means that there is NO

medical reason WHAT SO EVER to recommend that AIDS suffers or

AIDS antibody positive folks be quarrantined. Such

recommendations are motivated either by ignorance or by sinister

desires to set up concentration camps. Combined with the fact

that the disease is already well established in this country,

the above also means that there is no rational medical basis for

immigration laws preventing visits by AIDS suffers or antibody

positive persons.

The above also means that friends and family and coworkers

of AIDS patients and seropostive persons have nothing to fear

from such casual contact. There is no reason to not show your

love or concern for a friend with AIDS by embracing the person.

Indeed, there appears still to be NO rational basis for

excluding AIDS suffers from food preparation activity. Even if

an AIDS suffer cuts his or her finger and bleeds into the salad

or soup, most of the cells and virus will die, in most cases,

before the food is consumed. In addition, it is extremely

difficult to get successfully attacked by AIDS via stuff you

eat.

AIDS cannot be transmitted by the act of GIVING blood to a

blood bank. All equipment used for such blood donation is

sterile, and is used just once, and then discarded.

How is AIDS transmitted?

Sexual activity is one of the primary ways AIDS is

transmitted. AIDS is transmitted particulary by the transmission

of blood or semen of an infected person into contact with the

blood of an uninfected person. Sex involving penetration of the

penis into either the vagina of a woman or the rectum of either

a woman or a man has a very high risk of transmitting the

disease. It is felt to be about four times MORE likely for an

infected male to transmit AIDS to an uninfected woman in the

course of vaginal sex than it is likely for an infected woman to

transmit AIDS to an uninfected male. This probably relates to

the greater area of moist tissue in a woman’s vagina, and to the

relative liklihood of microscopic tears to occur in that tissue

during sex. But the bottom line is that AIDS can be transmitted

in EITHER direction in the case of heterosexual sex.